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HEALTHY PEOPLE • HEALTHY PLANET

Common Ground

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virtually nuts!

What ever happened to the real world?
Pharmaceutical cholesterol TV ads clog reality
Your letters on BC Hydro • Municipalities protest Bill 30
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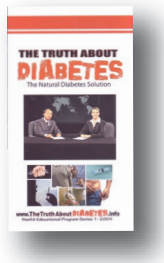

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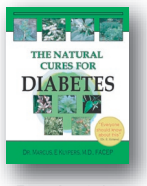

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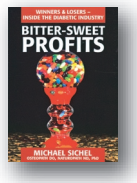

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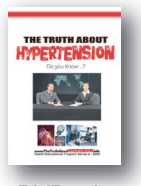

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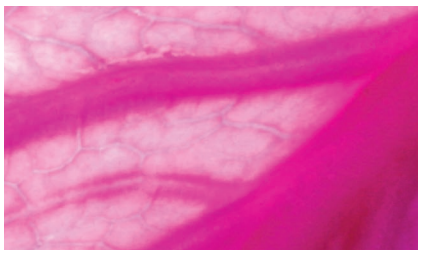

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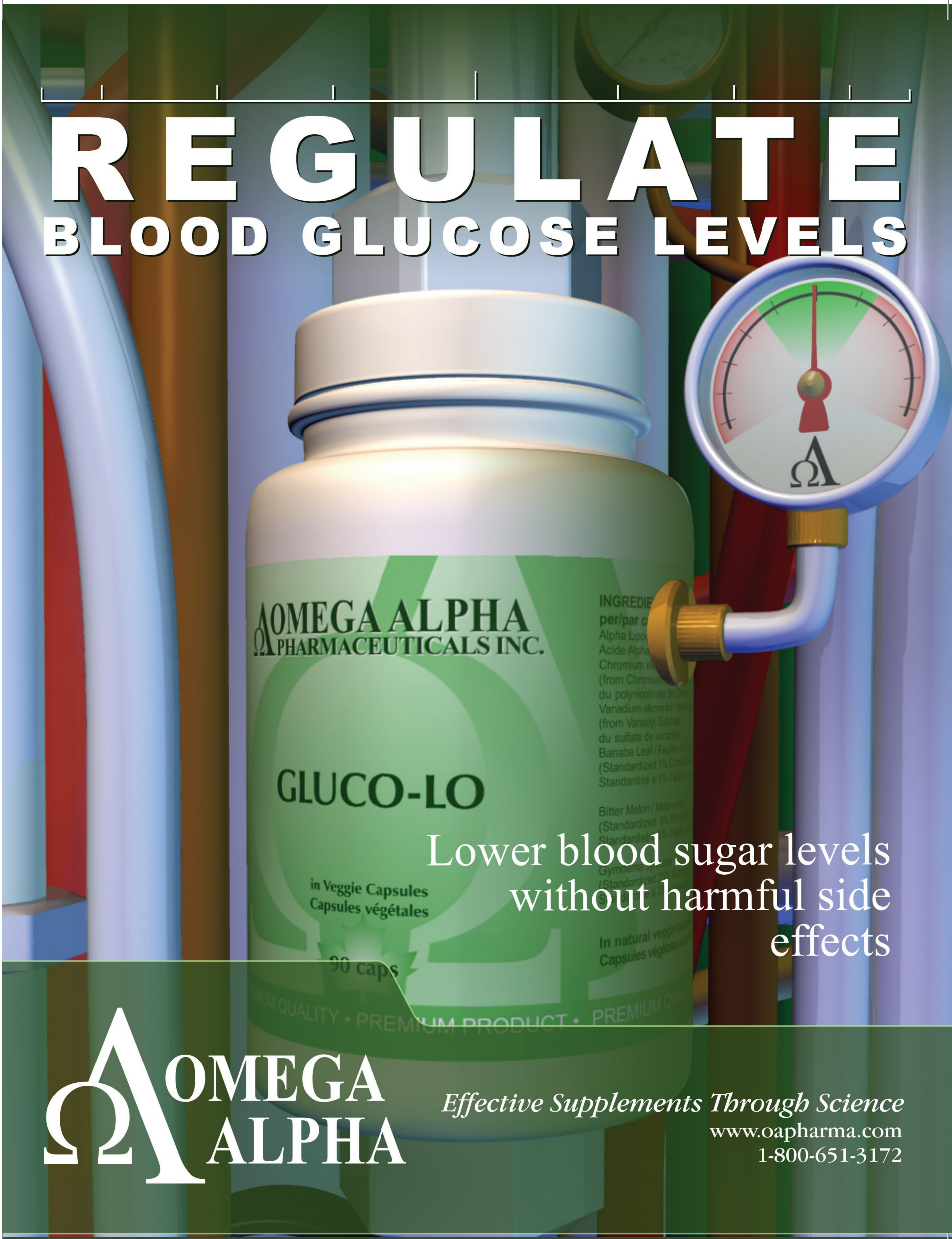

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Virtuality and its discontents

BY GEOFF OLSON

"You may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife, and you may ask yourself: how did I get here?"
David Byrne – the Talking Heads

Palm trees and blue skies; a gentle breeze drifting over rolling sand dunes. What could be better than this?

I was putzing around in Second Life, Linden Lab's hugely popular Internet community with more than one million members worldwide. My "avatar," an onscreen figure representing my identity online, wandered over bridges and along walkways, while other avatars around me did their own thing (including dancing and flying).

Anyone with a high-speed Internet connection can join Second Life for free. You even receive a small virtual stipend, in "Linden dollars." Some members even put down real money by credit card, to purchase cyber-properties. Marketers have seen the writing on the digitized wall; several automakers have a presence in Second Life. Even the news-agency *Reuters* maintains an outpost, employing the news world's "first virtual bureau chief," with his own cyber-office and avatar.

The landscape rendering and architectural detail of Second Life is impressive. Yet this online world reminds me of a nineties' cartoon of a character standing in a video arcade, wearing a virtual reality headset. Peering into a vista much like Second Life (cascading waterfalls, palm trees and buildings pleasing to the eye), he exclaims, "What a beautiful world!" Outside the arcade, the real world is a cesspool of polluted streams, belching smokestacks and crumbling buildings.

As glaciers recede and wilderness shrinks, will sunny sim-worlds, like Second Life, hold even more appeal? Before we haul our pixilated butts into electronic Shangri-las, perhaps we should heed our science-fiction visionaries, from Philip K. Dick to the Washowski brothers, who warned that virtuality can be a tricky thing.

Before we haul our pixilated butts into electronic Shangri-las, perhaps we should heed our science-fiction visionaries, from Philip K. Dick to the Washowski brothers, who warned that virtuality can be a tricky thing.

Virtuality, in the sense intended here, isn't just about computer simulations. It's the science and art of making "genuine fakes." We live in an age of virtual sex (over phone lines and the Internet), virtual bodies (injections and implants), virtual buildings (condominium complexes with superficial appeal, but little structural integrity), virtual politics (politicians driven by branding experts), virtual finance (fiscal tricks such as hedge funds and derivatives), virtual food (transfats and artificial flavouring, genetically engineered vegetables, etc.), and even virtual pop stars (off-pitch megastars corrected by music editing software). There's obviously an embarrassment of technical riches in the First World. It's just that these riches are beginning to feel as insubstantial as a handshake from Ken Lay's ghost.

In his 2002 Oscar acceptance speech, filmmaker Michael Moore summed up the state of virtuality in the US: "We live in fictitious times, with a fictitious president, elected in a fictitious election, to fight a fictitious war." Two years earlier, the US Supreme Court demanded a stop to a ballot recount in Florida, ensuring that a lexically-challenged man-child from Crawford, Texas, become the president select. By the 2004 federal race, it was déjà vu for the Democrats, as voters in the swing state of Ohio encountered electoral anomalies of their own. The myriad reported problems with electronic voting machines, which are being increasingly used across the US, has observers wondering if electoral democracy in the US is now little more than a shell (or a shell game). Not that Canadians can afford to feel smug in this department. The floor-crossing of former Liberal MP David Emerson in the Vancouver-Kingsway riding, and his subsequent contempt for his constituents' concerns, made it plain that at least one district in Vancouver has taxation without representation. Further, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's recent decision to muzzle his own MPs exposes a packaged quality to our much-vaunted "freedom."

Virtuality has dissolved the line separating news and advertising, politics and public relations, terrorism and antiterrorism, the private from the public, and entertainment with all of the above. When former Fox News anchor Tony Snow became presidential press secretary last year, no one so much as blinked. (For something resembling public shock and awe, Tony would have to show up on Oprah with a tell-all book, outlining how he and Oliver North used to ship Soylent Green through Area 51 – when they weren't out pistol-whipping nuns with Bill O'Reilly.)

For a clue on how deeply Washington has descended into a Bizarro World virtuality of its own, consider this anecdote reported by Ron Suskind of *The New York Times* from his 2004 conversation with a "Top Republican aide" to Bush:

"The aide said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as peo-

ple who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.' I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality... We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.' "

As the insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan spirals out of control, the official response is to deny reality – while programming a more entertaining one, merging virtual liberation with the gaming industry. Several years ago, the Pentagon launched an electronic division devoted to simulating Middle Eastern urban warfare. The video training exercises are then released to private gaming companies for adaptation to the market. (The head of one company recently bragged that his employees had Fallujah rendered even before the battle in the Iraqi city was over.) The question is, considering the vector of virtual war from the Pentagon to Walmart, does the programming and marketing really end at the point of purchase, or is it really only the beginning, in the minds of children?

Physicist Max Frisch once said that technology is "the knack of so arranging the world that we don't have to experience it." How long before the school field trip is simply a wander through a higher-bandwith Google Earth? I recall an anecdote, a few years back, about a primary school teacher in Eastern Canada, who assigned her class an essay about interacting with nature. One of her students sidled up to her desk, and confessed she found the assignment too difficult; she had never even climbed a tree before. At the point that we can convincingly simulate tree-climbing, getting back to nature will no longer be the only game in town. This is virtuality's Faustian bargain: that we can inherit a second life while losing our sensibilities in the first one.

With traditional face-to-face community declining, we have every reason to believe virtual culture has a marked effect on our sense of self. With the explosion of hi-tech fakery, do people feel their own "real" lives to be incrementally more ghostlike?

Television was the first high-tech cradle to rock us to sleep, starting in the fifties. In his 2002 *Atlantic Monthly* essay *The Numbing of the American Mind,* Thomas de Zengotita argues that the generational conditioning by television and other media has some surprising consequences. This is why a couple of weeks in nature doesn't quite cut it anymore for urban adults.

He asserts: "You will virtualize everything you encounter anyway, all by yourself." Raised on a steady diet of nature shows, "you won't see wolves, you'll see 'wolves'." You'll murmur to yourself: "Wow, look, a real wolf, not in a cage, not on TV, I can't believe it."

"Natural things have become their own icons," de Zengotita writes. The author believes the end result of this process is a subtle state of anesthesia.

This is virtuality's Faustian bargain: that we can inherit a second life while losing our sensibilities in the first one.

Using Times Square in New York as an example, de Zengotita notes the entire space is "firing message modules, straight for your gonads, your taste buds, your vanities, your fears. These modules seek to penetrate, but in a passing way. A second of your attention is all they ask. Nothing is firing that rends or cuts. It's a message, really, if you just go with it. And why not? Some of the most talented people on the planet have devoted their lives to creating this psychic sauna, just for you."

Ersatz environments and colourful advertisements have been with us since the fifties, de Zengotita adds, but the multimedia blitz we experience now represents a whole new level of persuasion: "Saying that it's just more of what we had before is like saying a hurricane is just more breeze." De Zengotita argues that the psyche protects itself from these message modules by going into a hyper-ironic stance, distancing from direct feeling. The approach of the young to information overload is not resistance, but a semi-detached surrender to the 24-hour news cycle; the iPod; the chat line; the video game; the text message; the Internet and the cell phone. Their worldliness is expressed mostly as cynicism about the boomers' decades-long fumbling of the globe. If they can be said to have a motto, it's one of numbing and resignation, summed up by: "Whatever."

The situation may be dire, but it's not hopeless. "Hundreds of people descended on Liverpool Street station for the biggest ever turnout for the latest Internet craze – mobile clubbing," reported the *Daily Mail* in October. "Students, business people and office workers danced in silence as they listened to their iPods, among commuters listening to announcements about late trains." On the surface, this may sound dysfunctional, even sad, but it may offer a small ray of hope. The human impulse for shared experience is surprisingly resilient. Even Second Life is ultimately an effort to seek out community –albeit in a way that seems to deconstruct the very effort.

According to biologist J.Z. Young, "we create tools and then mould ourselves by the use of them." The feedback loop between creators and their creations makes techno-prophecy difficult, if not impossible. Yet the central question with virtuality is the one posed by all science fiction dystopias: do machines serve human beings, or do human beings serve the machines?

There is still the chance to bend our tools to a higher purpose, to awaken from hyper-capitalism's fever dream of endless distraction, rampant consumption, invented enemies and clashing armies. The clock is ticking, and few of us relish the idea of living through "Grand Theft Auto: The Biosphere," without the hope of finding an escape key. As Neo discovered in *The Matrix,* waking up from an electronic trance, and witnessing the "desert of the real," is not an easy task. But it may be the first step in salvaging anything remotely human for the future.

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I'm the green guy in the "Pink Panther Lounge" giving you a feel of Second Life.

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UBCM demands BC Liberals repeal Bill30

Delegates attending the Union of BC Municipalities convention in Victoria voted almost unanimously October 25, to demand that the BC Liberal government repeal legislation that undermines local government authority over independent power projects.

In May 2006, the provincial government passed legislation that removed local control over zoning decisions in relation to independent power projects, despite earlier promises to respect municipal decision-making authority.

Whistler Mayor Ken Melamed lead the municipal opposition to Section 53 of Bill 30. At the convention, NDP municipal affairs critic Charlie Wyse called on the Liberals to listen to communities and respect the resounding support for the UBCM resolution. Speakers in support of the resolution included representatives from Squamish, Whistler, Maple Ridge, Comox and Christina Lake.

Local governments want the BC Liberals to stick to their promises and respect municipal authority. Bill 30 was an arrogant attack on local decision-making and the offending section should be repealed. Independent power projects have significant implications for the environment and communities. Local governments should be given back the opportunity to plan for their communities and to make decisions that are in their best interests. Bill 30 takes that right away.

Meanwhile in the BC Supreme Court, Kitimat is seeking to overturn a set of ministerial orders from 1997 and 2002 that allow Alcan to sell electricity generated by the Nechako and Kemano river systems, at the expense of aluminum production. Kitimat Mayor Richard Wozney says that there is no longer any reason for Alcan to stay in Kitimat if it can close down its old smelter instead of replacing it and "fire everyone and sell the electricity generated by our river for half a billion dollars of profit each year."

Should Alcan be allowed to export power in an unrestricted manner using the Powerex distribution system, the US government enforcing NAFTA rules on BC Hydro won't be far behind. If that happens, we will shortly be paying the same electrical power rates as Los Angeles, which will initially be at least four to five times what we pay now. (www.hydrofacts-bc.ca) (http://bcndpcaucus.ca)

Letters to the editor

To the Editor:

What a dynamite revelation your October 2006 issue is! Thank you for devoting so much attention and space to the topic of the biggest sell-out and breach of public trust in BC's history. Thank goodness, a growing number of folks are becoming aware of how we are deliberately deceived by our political representatives. With your articles, those people who thought the power-production licenses were only about the "awful coal" will understand just what a cynical and literal smoke screen the coal power production was/is. Don't we all believe that hydroelectric power is a clean and renewable source so why worry? The double-speak assigns benign names to things that are really quite detrimental and not in the public interest.

Clean, renewable energy: at what cost?

Again, thank you,
Gudrun Langolf, Vancouver

To the editor:

Thank you for you expose on Bill 30. I hope it will garner the necessary action to stop this horror story.

I also very much apreciate HEALTH by Alan Cassels, Child Honoring and so much more.

Sincerely,
Joanna Wilkinson, Victoria

Hello Mr. Joseph Roberts

Ugh. I don't know why I keep on reading 'Common Ground'. Every time I read it, I get angry, depressed, frustrated. I am more and more convinced that the only real function of our government is to serve as a tax collection basin in order to cover the costs of large non-local corporate enterprises, using the cover story that 'we all need corporate jobs to maintain our economy'. Of course I am being facetious, I am incredibly thankful that you and your group of writers are taking on these issues and informing the public, regardless of whether or not any of it really sinks in with enough people to make any difference.

Thank you for the article on BC Hydro. I came from Alberta where so much was privatized, and of course that was the beginning of the end of governments for public welfare. I watched as electricity and gas rates skyrocketed, customer service dropped to nil, confusion reigned supreme, and huge corporations raked in huger profits from public utilities. Heating costs doubled, then tripled, then people just sighed and lost track. And it made me think: is this really about PUBLIC and PRIVATE? Or is it really about **huge corporations** being supported by local govts in making huge profits and putting nothing back in to the community other than a few jobs that may pay today but can easily be gone tomorrow, as our society is now ever increasingly dependent on corporate jobs for their very survival? I watched as lake water levels dropped to provide water for petroleum processing plants, entire forests disappeared into stinking pulp mills, land chemically fertilized to death and to the point that it now won't even grow a dandelion every 3 feet, gas pipelines crisscrossing the countryside only a few miles apart, oil wells pumping 10 kms apart all across the landscape, strip mines miles and miles long, rivers polluted into toxic substances and aboriginal peoples still taking their food from these rivers and getting sick, land around Olds poisoned indefinitely with methane gas, and no corporations in sight taking responsibility to do any repairs. I wondered, is this what a small local responsible company would do, or is this what mega-corporations do because they know they can get away with it because they have somehow convinced govts that what they are

doing is somehow good for people and the land? Like I said, it seems like all govt is for now is to collect taxes from us in order to give big subsidies to big corporations, and then use our tax dollars to clean up the unbelievably horrid messes they leave behind. They come in, get the provincial govt to set up the legalities they need, then they use our land and water and air and trees, make us all sick with pollution, then sell us private health care (which in itself is ridiculous--what sane person wouldn't realize the conflict of interest in allowing companies to profit from ill health created in part by corporate irresonsibility??), then leave all the mess for us to pay for with our tax dollars and watch as former govt officials leave office and go to work with these same huge corporations. Which is very lucrative--executives joining energy companies based in Calgary can become millionaires within a few years, and that is only at the lower level. This is a very basic reality about human nature: GREED.

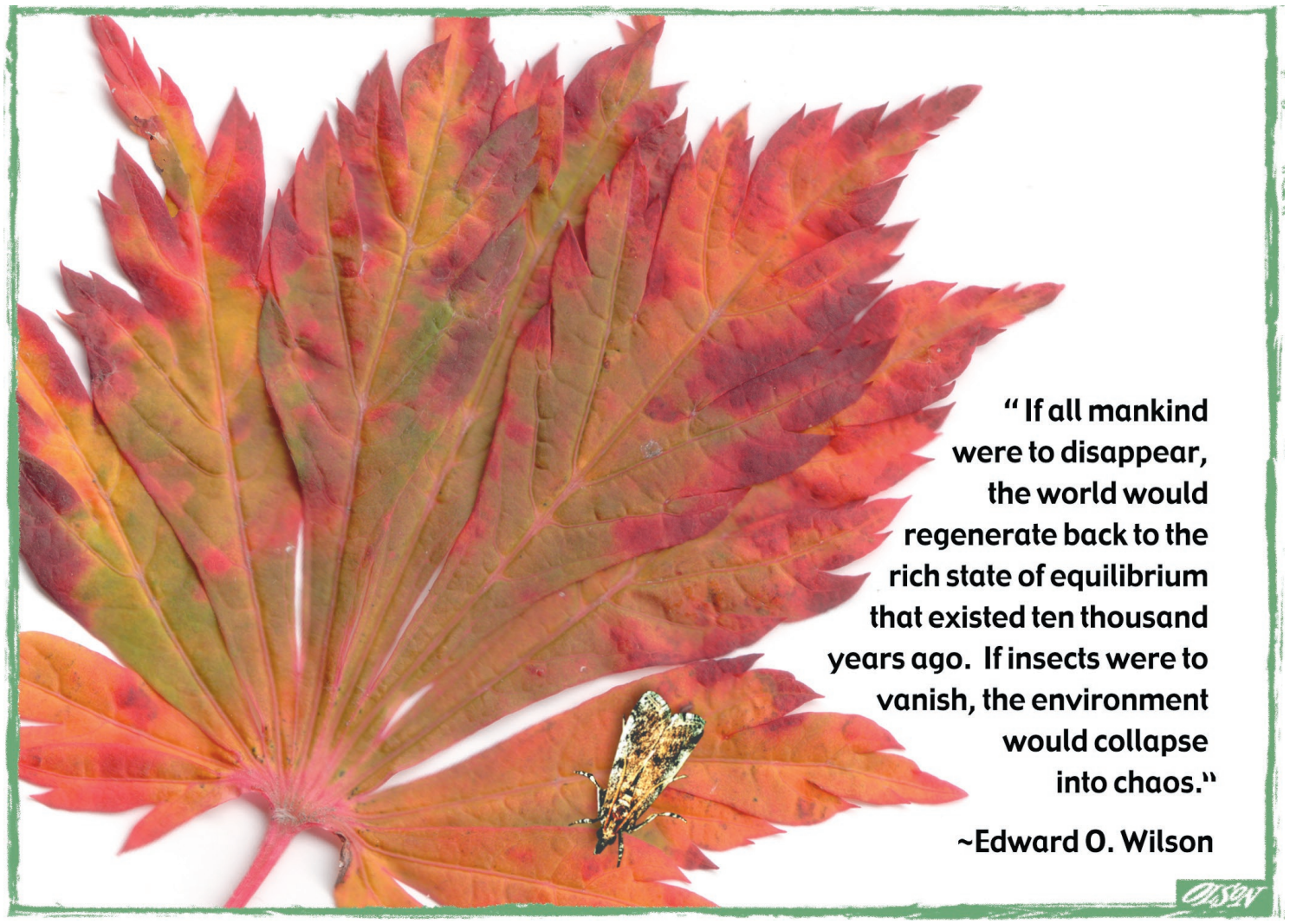
The question arises: why are we all letting this happen and doing nothing about it? Well, although no one can disagree with positive thinking, perhaps we are all too busy trying to think positively to realize that something ugly is going on beneath our noses, and what is going to happen when our children see it all one day in the aftermath and look at us and ask why on earth didn't you do anything about it!???????

I do what I can, I read, I think, I write letters, I shop locally, I grow my own food, and according to Wendell Berry I am doing a good thing. But things like what you wrote about with BC Hydro are still happening, and very quickly too, and it seems like we are powerless to stop it. Quite frankly I don't think that even a hundred thousand letters to Gordon Campbell is going to stop them, because they are caught up in the ideology and they believe they are doing good for us all. We call nature 'resources' and then wonder why accountants and economists then see it/them merely as things to be used for current consumption habits and nothing more. Wendell Berry wrote about all of this in his book, "The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture" in 1977 and it is horrifically appropriate. Maybe it just took this long for the mega-corporate greed to hit Western Canada. One thing I agree with him about: we are too addicted to mega-corporate industrial products and the comfortable lifestyle we assume, we have given up on many basic values and we will lose our nature, our clean air, our clean water, our clean fish, our health, everything, if we don't learn to say NO to mega-corporate products, from processed foods to cars to computers. Not that we shouldn't have these things at all, but that if we could learn to produce more of what we 'need' locally, then corporate responsibility would be much easier to enforce. The importance of local responsibility is down just as much to companies as to individuals, and in fact, perhaps that is the crux: mega-corporations suffer extreme lack of personal responsibility.

And finally, I just learned that the Campbell Mega-Corporate Tax-Break Office is now planning on changing the rules for meat processing for farms, making it illegal to have on-farm slaughtering and farmgate sales of meat by Sept 2007. I sure hope you can do a big story on this in the next issue or two because this has huge implications for not only the safety of our food supply but also the corporate concentration of power in the food supply. All the issues you bring up in your magazine are relevant to farmers and I hope that you do get circulation in smaller communities, because the farmers are our last hope for maintaining our land and health in this time of mega-corporate pillaging. If you want to read a letter that is being sent to the government by organic farmers (about the meat issue), I can send you a copy.

So thank you for enraging me once more. That is what your magazine does so well. Thinking may be painful at times but it is preferable to numbness.

Shannon LeBlanc, from????????????


" If all mankind were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state of equilibrium that existed ten thousand years ago. If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos."
~Edward O. Wilson
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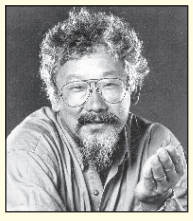

Ocean life makes waves

SCIENCE MATTERS • *DAVID SUZUKI*

ENVIRONMENT

Most people have heard of the "butterfly effect" – the idea that a small change, such as a butterfly flapping its wings in one part of the world, can set in motion a series of events that leads to a big event, such as a tornado, somewhere else. The term is largely used as a metaphor, but science now shows that there's a literal aspect to the theory that has much broader implications.

To say that everything is connected to everything else has become a cliché, but its true especially in nature. Scientist and author James Lovelock uses the term Gaia to describe the Earth as a living, self-regulating system. According to this hypothesis, all of the planets biological creatures are intimately connected with all of its physical systems, from the soils to the oceans to the atmosphere. Changes in any of these systems can affect everything else.

We can see how connected everything is when we release long-lasting substances into the atmosphere. Toxins, for example, can drift out of a smokestack in Hamilton, Ontario or Mumbai, India, circle the Earth on the winds or ocean currents, and end up in seemingly pristine areas such as the Far North. In fact these toxins are now found concentrated in the fat of marine mammals and in human breast milk.

In an interconnected world, even a creature as small and seemingly inconsequential as the tiny, shrimp-like krill can have a big impact. These one-to-two centimeter-long creatures already play an important role in the ocean food chain and are a staple in the diet of some of the world's largest whales. But krill are so small that few would have suspected they could play an important role in generating currents that help mix our ocean waters.

Yet, that's exactly what a team of researchers from the University of Victoria found off the coast of British Columbia's Vancouver Island. The researchers looked at a deep ocean inlet where different layers of the water mix very little. They found that thousands of krill, on their nightly upward migration from the deep water to the surface to feed, increased the mixing of water by three to four orders of magnitude. In other words, these tiny creatures actually cause quite a stir.

Turbulence has largely been thought to be driven almost exclusively by physical forces, like the winds and the tides, but swimming organisms may be one of the most important drivers of ocean turbulence.

And it isn't just krill that cause this water stirring, or "turbulence." All living organisms that exhibit similar behaviour can cause turbulence, helping to bring cold, nutrient-rich water up to the surface. This exchange of cold and warm water is vital to the productivity of the oceans. It also helps break down human wastes and it even plays an important role in the climate.

But turbulence has largely been thought to be driven almost exclusively by physical forces, like the winds and the tides, rather than by biological forces. The very idea that the behaviour of individual organisms can affect entire systems seems fantastic. Yet the researchers in Victoria conclude that sea creatures themselves may be a critical, but overlooked, source of turbulence in the oceans.

Other researchers go ever further. An article in the *Journal of Marine Research* calculates that, based on the math, swimming organisms may be one of the most important drivers of ocean turbulence. If this is the case, the authors conclude, then the overfishing that has caused fish stocks to plummet, and the near extinction of many whale species due to hunting may have disrupted ocean turbulence enough to have affected the planet's climate.

Seemingly small actions can have big consequences. More and more, we are finding that our world is not nearly as vast and limitless as we once supposed. Not only is it interconnected, but it is this very interconnectedness that drives it. In this world, we are all butterflies and we need to be mindful of what can happen when we flap our wings.

Join the Nature Challenge and learn more at (www.davidsuzuki.org).

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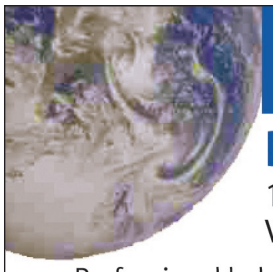

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Our friends in the universe

EARTHFUTURE • *GUY DAUNCEY*

I want to write about other life in the Universe – aliens, little green men, or as I prefer, human equivalents: "humanees." I hope you'll stay with me to see where I'm going.

As I wrote last month, our galaxy contains between 100 and 400 billion stars; the staff at the Hubble space telescope reckons there are some 125 billion galaxies in the universe. That gives us 20,000 quadrillion stars, each of which might have planets in orbit. Since none of us has been there, it would be pretty self-centered to assume that out of all those stars, Earth is the only place where life has developed in the universe.

The universe has been evolving for some 14 billion years, but the earliest humans only appeared seven million years ago. That's a very thin slice of time – the last 18 days – if we shrink evolution down to a year. We've only developed science in the last 250 years – the last 90 minutes – and travelled in space since 1961, the last 16 minutes.

The universe has been evolving for some 14 billion years, but the earliest humans only appeared seven million years ago. That's a very thin slice of time – the last 18 days – if we shrink evolution down to a year.

If other civilizations have developed, they could easily be a million or even a hundred million years more advanced than us. If we assume a 50/50 chance that some are more advanced, and some less, that's still an awful lot of civilizations that could be more advanced. Considering the changes that have happened since 1906 on Earth, can we conceive of life in another 100 years from now, a million years?

From everything we know, the entire universe is made from the same basic atoms and governed by the same laws of gravity and light. Take away gravity, and every planet would rush away from its sun at its speed of orbit; we, Earthlings, would be deep-frozen in minutes. In their physical forms, the universe's civilizations are probably governed by the same basic laws.

In the world I inhabit the spiritual realm is more "solid" than the material. My life's experience tells me that prayer works, meditation works, and that we live within a vast and loving invisible connectedness that is just as real as rock and water. I don't need religion to know this, although religions have accumulated a good supply of music and ritual that can help us on our journey, provided we stay away from the brain-control and small-mindedness some preachers seek to impose.

Ever since I was a teenager, I have known that the universe must be a single unity. How could it be otherwise? If there were two universes they would be in relationship to each other, and that relationship would create a unity. One universe, one unity – and since if there is a spiritual realm it must exist everywhere – that means one loving connectedness throughout the universe.

When white people first met black, they were shocked; when we first met elephants, we were also shocked. We got used to it, and found that we could share love. With time we have learned that when fear is removed, love is the natural condition. This logic tells me that when we do meet beings from another planetary civilization, whether in physical or psychic form, once we get over the shock, we will discover love.

Now, let's return to the present, where we spend so much energy fighting over whose religion is best, whose views are best and which country, or region, will dominate the others. It's like a cosmic stupidity, two-year olds fighting over their toys, each determined to impose his or her will on the other. As two-year-olds we hopefully learn that accepting the discipline of the larger family brings peace and stability. If we don't, later life becomes very difficult.

What will it take for us to learn the discipline of cooperating together today as a global family? If we had such cooperation it would be easy to tackle global warming, hunger, warfare and everything else, and we could blossom together, in conditions of peace and stability. We have no parents to impose this on us; we have to step forward and do it ourselves. If we don't, our life will soon become very difficult.

Guy Dauncey is the author of Stormy Weather: 101 Solutions to Global Climate Change *and other books, and president of the BC Sustainable Energy Association* (www.earthfuture.com).

How Often Do You Hear Yourself Saying

"NO, I Haven't Done It Yet,

I've Been Meaning To!"

Discover The Secret Psychology Of Eliminating Procrastination FOR GOOD!

Stephan Stavrakis
Mcht, Mnlp
Canada's TOP Mental Strategies Coach

Their minds are a hodge-podge of half baked ideas and "I've been meaning toos". They think of a thousand "schemes" to make money quickly—but DO nothing about them. Thoughts flash in and out of their brain with the speed of lightning. New ideas rush in crowding out old ones before they have taken form, shape or completion.

They are SCATTER-BRAINED...

Their mind is like a powerful automobile running wild—destroying their hopes and dreams, their POSSIBILITIES! They wonder why they don't get ahead and never get anything done. They cannot understand why others, with less ability, pass them in the prosperity parade. They pity themselves, excuse themselves, and sympathize with themselves. The great tragedy is that they have every quality that leads to success--intelligence, originality, imagination, ambition and completion! Their trouble is that they don't know how to USE their brain properly.

Their mental make-up needs an OVERHAULING...

There are millions like them—failures, half successes—slaves to those with BALANCED, ORDERED MINDS. It is a known fact that most of us use only one-tenth of our brainpower. The other nine-tenths are dissipated into thousands of fragmentary thoughts, daydreaming, wishing. We are only paid for ONE-TENTH of what we possess because that is all we USE. We also accomplish things with the same ONE-TENTH.

We are hundred horse-power motors delivering only ONE-TENTH of the total horse power we possess!! The reason most people fall miserably below what they dream of attaining in life is that certain mental faculties in them BECOME ABSOLUTELY HALF-STARVED THROUGH DISUSE and "Non-Supporting Thoughts," just as a muscle often does. If, for instance, you lay for a year in bed, you would sink to the ground when you arose; your leg muscles, UNUSED FOR SO LONG, they could not support you.

You Possess Everything You Need In Your Mind!

It is no different with those rare mental faculties, which you envy others for possessing. You actually DO possess them, but they are ALMOST HALF-STARVED, like unused muscles, simply because they are faculties you seldom, if ever, USE. Be honest with yourself. You know in your heart that you can have more, be more, and attain more if you just begin to do the things you know you need to get down now!

If you are asking yourself:

- **What is the matter with me?**
- **Why am I procrastinating?**
- **Why can't I get anything done?**

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- Why intensity is key to eliminate procrastination.
- How motivation can be created instantly even if you don't feel like it!

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- Christopher Streicher LLB,MBA

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Fear sells: Are you ready to buy?

DRUG BUST • *ALAN CASSELS*

HEALTH

Quick, here' s a skill-testing question: What do a rhino on a street corner, a shark in a swimming pool and a bull about to charge a woman hanging laundry have in common? 1)They're a new wave of cutesy ads by Telus. 2)They're Gary Larson comic reruns. 3)They're fear-mongering ads designed to get you running to your doctor for a cholesterol test.

If you answered 3, it is because you know the name of this column. OK, you pass. Keep reading.

Let's be clear: Fear sells. Consumers are constantly bombarded by fear-mongering messages, and this fear drives us to buy. The marketers of cholesterol-lowering drugs are not ignorant of this fact. And, they are clearly benefiting from our fear that a heart attack is about to strike, as menacingly as the shark lurking in our swimming pool, or the dark shadow ready to bite off our legs. Cue the *Jaws* music.

In one ad campaign, Pfizer, which makes Lipitor (atorvastatin), the market leader in cholesterol-lowering (statin) drugs, ran newspaper ads in France and Canada showing the tagged toe of a corpse. "What would you rather have, a cholesterol test or a final exam?" asks the headline. The key message is that getting a cholesterol check and then, probably taking drugs to alter your cholesterol, will prevent a premature death. Even, if you are otherwise healthy.

Another ad shows a man walking down the street, a rhinoceros lurking around the corner. The ad says: "Living with high cholesterol, you never know what' s around the corner." Yet another ad shows a man floating in a backyard pool, holding a tall drink, a shark below him. The tagline says it all: "Living with high cholesterol. You could be surprised at what's lurking beneath."

But, what is lurking behind these ads? The drug companies, which wear the camouflage of groups such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Canadian Lipid Nurse Network and the Canadian Diabetes Association, whose logos festoon these ads. Big Pharma easily hides its fingerprints – they' ve got the financial bulk to get the organizations they support to do the fear mongering for them.

What most people won't learn from such ads is that when scientists have done meta-analyses (a study of a collection of studies) of the largest statin drug trials, they inevitably find that the drugs show no difference in mortality, when compared against placebo. There may be some changes in heart attack rates, but no changes in overall deaths, which is what the ads are all implying. We don' t call this disease avoidance, we call it disease substitution. The drug may prevent a heart attack death but in the process will cause other kinds of deaths, a sort of zero sum gain that is the equivalent of taking an expensive placebo.

Let's be clear: ads featuring a charging rhino, or a shark in your pool, would likely scare you. And, the strength of the logos, of the "impartial" agencies accompanying the ads, would tend to give them some surface credibility. But not all people are running scared. In fact, a growing number of people are taking great pains to deconstruct the cholesterol empire, brick by brick.

Eddie Vos is an engineer who lives in Montreal and he's a member of *the International Network of Cholesterol Skeptics* (www.thincs.org/), a network of researchers, physicians and scientists around the world who are seriously questioning the orthodoxy around cholesterol. Members of this network say that blaming heart disease on the consumption of animal fat, and a person's "high" cholesterol, is simplistic and misguided. They question the advertising of this disease called "high cholesterol," and the fear-mongering scare ads around cholesterol, when there is so much uncertainty still.

Eddie Vos criticizes drug companies for "indirectly promoting drugs using direct-to-consumer advertising in a way that does not respect ' the ethical criteria' of the WHO, namely, being accurate, informative and balanced." He was so upset by the cholesterol fear-mongering ads that he wrote to federal Health Minister Tony Clement.

The reply is a masterful stroke of Orwellian self-deception that leaves no doubt which side Health Canada is on. The health minister wrote: "Help-seeking messages such as the campaign described in your correspondence, where a health problem such as cholesterol is mentioned, but no reference to a specific drug product is made, are considered of a non-promotional nature. The cholesterol prevention help-seeking messages currently meet the criteria set out in Health Canada's policy document *The Distinction Between Advertising and Other Activities,* and is not considered advertising and therefore, not subject to the requirements of the Food and Drug Act."

Let me translate: Health Canada says it's OK for the drug companies to mislead and scare Canadians because they aren' t actually advertising a drug. Statin investors of Canada, rejoice!

If a fear-mongering cholesterol ad drives you into a doctor's office here in Canada, and he or she determines that you need a fix for your high cholesterol, you're likely to walk out with a free sample of Lipitor. To say the sales of Lipitor, the top selling drug in the world, are robust is a gross understatement: Pfizer sells about $14 billion worth every year.

Pfizer also employs award-winning

continued on p.14

What most people won' t learn from the fear-mongering ads is that when scientists have done meta-analyses of the largest statin drug trials, they inevitably find that the drugs show no difference in mortality when compared against placebo.

Baked potato bounty

NUTRISPEAK • *VESANTO MELINA MS, RD*

On crisp autumn days, we welcome our return to a warm home. It increases our pleasure to be greeted by the scrumptious aromas of potatoes baking in the oven and a savoury soup simmering on the stove.

Vegetables such as potatoes and yams are welcome features of fall menus. The potato originated in what is now Peru and was taken to Europe by explorers in the late 1400s. Potatoes were a mainstay of the Irish for centuries, until crops failed in the 1840s. Potatoes are more nutritious than you may realize, providing our day's supply of vitamin C, plus plenty of B vitamins (thiamin, niacin, pyridoxine or vitamin B6, folate, pantothenic acid) and minerals (copper, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, zinc). A large baked potato provides 325 calories and 7 grams of protein; if we add 1/ 4 cup tahini dressing (recipe follows), we'll get 12 grams of protein (about 20 to 25 percent of our day's recommended intake).

Potatoes are more nutritious than you may realize, providing our day's supply of vitamin C, plus plenty of B vitamins and minerals.

Building a meal around potatoes

It's easy to center a meal on the simple potato by adding some of the tasty toppings listed below. The oven-baked method gives an aromatic, flavorful crust. While our oven is on, it makes sense to bake plenty of potatoes and have leftovers that can be quickly warmed the next day. We can complete the meal with soup, salad, or chili.

Quick oven-baked potatoes

Although we may have viewed baking potatoes as a lengthy process, our time can be halved if we cut the potatoes, thereby allowing more surface area to contact the heat. To bake in half an hour or less, cut large potatoes in halves or in quarter wedges and place them on a dry baking sheet, or directly on the rack, in a very hot 450° or 500°F oven. If whole potatoes are used, pierce them three to four times with a fork to let steam escape, so they don't burst when cooking. The exact cooking time will depend on the size of the sections. Potatoes are done when a knife, fork, or skewer can be easily inserted.

Microwave potatoes

You won't get the crusty skin by this method, but it's quick. Cook whole, pierced potatoes in a microwave on high for about 5 minutes. The exact time required depends on the size of the potato.

Speedy pressure cooker potatoes

Another quick approach (though without the baked crust) is pressure cooking. Quarter the potatoes; add the minimum amount of water required by your cooker; place the potato pieces on a stainless steel steamer rack in the cooker, cover and bring up to high pressure over high heat. Reduce the heat just enough to maintain high pressure, and cook for about four minutes. Let the pressure come down naturally, or use a quick-release method (see your cooker's instruction manual).

Toppings

- Sesame tahini dressing (recipe below)
- Liquid gold dressing (see July 2006 Common Ground or books below)
- Your favourite low-fat salad dressing
- Buttery spread such as Earth Balance
- Salt and freshly cracked pepper
- Nutritional yeast flakes
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Flaxseed oil
- Miso, thinned with a little water
- Gravy (such as the Naam Restaurant's famous gravy)
- Salsa
- Seasoning blends (such as Spike or Mrs. Dash)
- Finely diced red or green pepper, tomato, or cucumber
- Shredded carrot or zucchini
- Dulse or kelp powder or flakes
- Chopped fresh herbs (parsley, cilantro, or basil)
- Veggie (soy) simulated bacon bits
- Mashed avocado

Sesame tahini dressing

This tasty, zesty dressing is a favourite on salads, baked potato, or steamed broccoli.

½ cup tahini
¼ cup lemon juice
1 tsp Dijon mustard
1 clove garlic, chopped
2 Tbsp tamari
½ tsp pepper (or to taste)
1 /2 cup water

Combine ingredients in a blender until smooth. Add a little water if you desire.

Vesanto Melina is co-author of seven food and nutrition classics and a consultant for individuals. These recipes and menu ideas are from Raising Vegetarian Children *(Stepaniak and Melina, McGraw-Hill, 2004) and* Becoming Vegetarian *(Melina and Davis, Wiley Canada, 2003).* (www.nutrispeak.com) (vesanto@nutrispeak.com) *604-882-6782.*

Cassels continued from p.13

advertising tactics to keep those sales robust. In April of this year, the prescription access litigation (PAL) project (www.prescriptionaccess.org/), a group trying to make drugs more affordable for US consumers, awarded Pfizer's, Lipitor, the 2006 Bitter Pill Award, alongside Crestor, another heavily pumped statin. The awards committee noted that "the marketing campaigns for Lipitor and Crestor have created the impression that anyone and everyone with even slightly elevated cholesterol needs them. This marketing gives short shrift to the much cheaper but effective generic statins, as well as to lifestyle changes, such as better diet and more exercise, that should be the first line of treatment for millions of people who have high cholesterol but no other major risk factors."

What you don't get in the ads scaring you to see your doc for a cholesterol test is any sense of the dangers these kinds of drugs pose. The product information accompanying all cholesterol-lowering drugs tells us in black and white that these drugs will increase a person's chance of developing muscle pain or rhabdomyolysis, a potentially fatal condition resulting from muscle breakdown.

Eddie Vos, on his website (www.health-heart.org) points to research that shows that there was "15 times more damaged muscle fiber in those on statins than in patients who were not, and this damage is so hidden that common lab tests cannot detect its existence, yet patients feel the effect."

Criticism of fear-mongering campaigns is not just coming from the fringes. There are ample critics, even within the world of orthodox medicine. The Pfizer toe tag ad incensed staff at the World Health Organization. Its officials wrote to the medical journal, *The Lancet,* stating that these disease-mongering ads were unethical because they mislead the public about cardiovascular risk. They recommended that "disease-awareness campaigns" be regulated to prevent the public from being bamboozled.

You see, with the Canadian-style, "non-promotional" advertising, in the form of these disease awareness campaigns, the companies don't even have to talk about side effects. Beauty, eh? Me, I' m going to relax in the pool, with a tall drink, and try not to think too much about the sharks, hovering nearby, ready to turn me into a patient.

Alan Cassels is co-author of Selling Sickness *and a drug policy researcher at the University of Victoria. He is also the founder of Media Doctor Canada (www.mediadoctor.ca), which evaluates reporting of medical treatments in Canada's media.*

Gourmet winter meals

ON THE GARDEN PATH • *CAROLYN HERRIOT*

Over the winter months, "What's for dinner?" in our house means "What shall we harvest from the garden?" So many vegetables thrive in the winter food garden that we plan lots of menus around them. Here's a sample of some of the meals we enjoy from October to April, months in which food gardens are usually considered unproductive.

A typical winter salad consists of a little bit of many things growing in the garden. I tear up young leaves of red Russian kale, Dutch curled kale, perpetual spinach, chard, arugula and corn salad, toss in some finely shredded tender baby leeks, and add chopped parsley, cilantro and scallions. I finish the salad by throwing in some mixed seeds or nuts, toss it with a tangy vinaigrette dressing, and garnish with calendula flower petals. Who could resist the appeal of such a vibrant salad?

Collards, perpetual spinach, beet greens and green curled kale are sweetest after hard frosts. We use them for steamed greens in lasagnas and cabbage roll type dishes, or add them shredded to casseroles, soups and rice dishes.

The patch of arugula, which self-seeded from a spring sowing, means we have tasty greens, mild and nutty when young, hot and spicy when mature, for sandwiches and salads. Arugula is also great sautéed with goat cheese and sundried tomatoes, the way Italians prepare it.

Corn salad provides mild greens, perfect for adding to sandwiches and salads. Individual leaves can be picked or the whole central rosette cut. Corn salad seeds freely around the garden, providing lots of fresh salad greens throughout the winter.

The strong celery flavour of celeriac root enhances casseroles and soups. Celeriac is much easier to grow than celery, and is sweet and crunchy raw for veggie dips. When cooked with the potatoes, it adds exceptional flavour to a hearty leek and potato soup.

Lutz beets are large, sweet when baked, and perfect for pickling. There's the added bonus of nutritious beet greens. Beets survive mild winters, but may need a protective mulch in colder climates. Top your winter salads with grated beets followed by a handful of mixed seeds or nuts.

Parsley grows close to the ground in winter, so the flavour is concentrated and enhances many winter dishes. Winter-hardy lettuces fare best under a protective cloche or cold frame. Winter Density and Valdor are hardy green lettuces; Rouge d'Hiver and Brunia are hardy red lettuces. Leafy Chinese coriander, or cilantro, will overwinter and even survive snow dumps with no protective covering. It adds a unique note to stir-fries, salsas and omelettes.

The patch of arugula, which self-seeded from a spring sowing, means we have tasty greens, mild and nutty when young, hot and spicy when mature.

The milder kale varieties, red Russian and Dutch green curled are tender enough to eat in salads. Coarser kales, such as Lacinato and Winterbor, provide greens with a stronger flavour. Redbor kale is as worth growing for a stunning purple accent in the garden, as for tender steamed greens.

Nothing beats Swiss chard for succulent greens; Fordhook Swiss giant is reliably winter hardy. Steam or sauté the succulent stalks and you will hardly be able to tell the difference between these and celery.

If you plant leeks in May, you'll be harvesting tender leeks from fall through winter. Even when there's snow on the ground, leeks can be pulled from the garden for dinner. The same goes for Jerusalem artichokes, which can be dug as needed, and are wonderful raw, in vegetable dips, as well as sweet and nutty when drizzled with olive oil and roasted for 25 minutes.

We look forward to spring for the tasty shoots of purple sprouting broccoli, and the succulent greens of First Early Market cabbage. Cauliflowers, broccoli and cabbages take root and establish over winter, and burst into growth when the soil warms up in spring.

The pleasure of harvesting nutritious winter vegetables from your own backyard will make the effort of planting from July to September more than worthwhile.

From A Year on the Garden Path A 52-Week Organic Gardening Guide *by Carolyn Herriot. $29.95, Earthfuture Publications, Victoria, BC. Available at Banyen Books, Duthie Books or at* (www.earthfuture.com/gardenpath).

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INSPIRATION FOR THE YEAR AHEAD...

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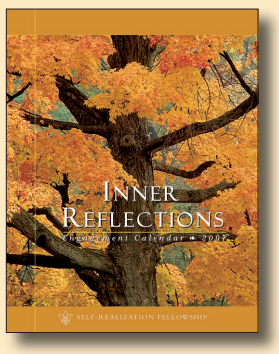

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Wherever you are, be there

THE POWER OF NOW • *ECKHART TOLLE*

See if you can catch yourself complaining, in either speech or thought, about a situation you find yourself in, what other people do or say, your surroundings, your life situation, even the weather.

To complain is always non-acceptance of what is. It invariably carries an unconscious negative charge. When you complain, you make yourself into a victim. When you speak out, you are in your power. So change the situation by taking action or by speaking out if necessary or possible; leave the situation or accept it. All else is madness.

Ordinary unconsciousness is always linked in some way with denial of the Now. The Now, of course, also implies the here. Are you resisting your here and now? Some people would always rather be somewhere else. Their "here" is never good enough. Through self-observation, find out if that is the case in your life. Wherever you are, be there totally.

Is there something that you "should" be doing but are not doing it? Get up and do it now. No excuses. No negativity. No psychic pollution. Keep your inner space clear.

If you find your here and now intolerable and it makes you unhappy, you have three options: remove yourself from the situation, change it, or accept it totally. If you want to take responsibility for your life, you must choose one of those three options, and you must choose now. Then accept the consequences. No excuses. No negativity. No psychic pollution. Keep your inner space clear.

If you take any action – leaving or changing your situation – drop the negativity first, if at all possible. Action arising out of insight into what is required is more effective than action arising out of negativity. Any action is often better than no action, especially if you have been stuck in an unhappy situation for a long time. If it is a mistake, at least you learn something, in which case it's no longer a mistake.

If you remain stuck, you learn nothing. Is fear preventing you from taking action? Acknowledge the fear, watch it, take your attention into it and be fully present with it. Doing so cuts the link between the fear and your thinking. Don't let the fear rise up into your mind. Use the power of the Now. Fear cannot prevail against it.

If there is truly nothing that you can do to change your here and now, and you can't remove yourself from the situation, then accept your here and now totally by dropping all inner resistance. The false, unhappy self that loves feeling miserable, resentful, or sorry for itself can then no longer survive. This is called surrender. Surrender is not weakness. There is great strength in it.

Only a surrendered person has spiritual power. Through surrender, you will be free internally of the situation. You may then find that the situation changes without any effort on your part. In any case, you are free.

Or is there something that you "should" be doing but are not doing it? Get up and do it now.

Alternatively, completely accept your inactivity, laziness, or passivity at this moment, if that is your choice. Go into it fully. Enjoy it. Be as lazy or inactive as you can. If you go into it fully and consciously, you will soon come out of it. Or maybe you won't. Either way, there is no inner conflict, no resistance, no negativity.

Are you stressed? Are you so busy getting to the future that the present is reduced to a means of getting there? Stress is caused by being "here" but wanting to be "there," or being in the present but wanting to be in the future. It's a split that tears you apart inside. To create and live with such an inner split is insane. The fact that everyone else is doing it doesn't make it any less insane.

If you have to, you can move fast, work fast, or even run, without projecting yourself into the future and without resisting the present. As you move, work, run – do it totally. Enjoy the flow of energy, the high energy of that moment. Now you are no longer stressed, no longer splitting yourself in two. Just moving, running, working – and enjoying it. Or you can drop the whole thing and sit on a park bench. But when you do, watch your mind. It may say: "You should be working. You are wasting time." Observe the mind. Smile at it.

Adapted from The Power of Now, *copyright 1999 by Eckhart Tolle. Reprinted with permission of New World Library, Novato, CA, 800-972-6657 (ext. 52).*

Wisdom in the Wilderness

UNIVERSE WITHIN • *GWEN RANDALL-YOUNG*

SPIRITUALITY

The clearest way into the universe is through a forest wilderness

– John Muir

Recently I spent a week on the Pacific, alternating between hiking along the ocean and through the rainforests. It was fall. Summer vacationers had returned to the city, so I felt secluded.

My accommodation was a rustic cabin, with a woodstove – no television, no telephone (not even cell phone reception) and no Internet access. The only sound was the gentle crashing of the waves upon the shore.

As there were often no people in sight, the experience, at times, felt surreal.

Walking along the beach in the morning mist, the vast sea on one side, and towering spruce trees on the other, I imagined what it must have been like for the earliest settlers.

It was not surprising, I mused, that the First Nations have such a deeply rooted spirituality. This land is infused with spirit. Breathing in the clear, moist air feels like breathing in the spirit of the Earth.

Entering the rainforest is like entering a sacred realm. It is so quiet. The tall trees, hundreds of years old, reach up to the sky. Most days the sunlight filtered through the trees, illuminating the forest floor. Green life sprouts everywhere in the rainforest: mosses, ferns, or new little trees growing out of nurse logs (bigger trees that have fallen to the ground).

These massive trunks, even in death, nurture new life. The forest also renews those who venture into its depths. And, I believe it speaks to us, infusing in us a deep wisdom. The following is some of what I learned from the forest:

• There is tremendous power in silence. We can really only connect with ourselves, our own inner spirit, when it is silent. The forest is full of powerful, vibrant energy, yet it does not say a word. Perhaps humans sometimes should simply connect with the energy of other humans rather than the usual talk - what is your name and what do you do?

• The forest has no agenda, no schedule and no goals. It just is. Each living organism simply lives. It does not worry about what other organisms are doing. All of them peacefully co-exist, even if moss, for example, decides to make its home right on top of another living thing. There are no territoriality issues here.

• A stream in the forest flows peacefully. If there is an obstacle, it gently flows around it. The stream knows its direction, but is unattached to following a certain path. It does not insist that rocks or trees change or rearrange themselves to facilitate its journey.

There is tremendous power in silence. We can really only connect with ourselves, our own inner spirit, when it is silent. The forest is full of powerful, vibrant energy, yet it does not say a word.

• The forest is self-sufficient because of interdependence. The ferns on the forest floor keep it cool, and help it to retain moisture. Fallen logs provide nurturance for new life.

• The forest is tenacious. At the edge of the rainforest of my adventure, where the Earth is lashed by winter waves, trees, slanted by forces that should fell them, and exposed roots, cling ferociously to the rocks.

Most profoundly, I realized that when we enter the forest, we become part of it. We are no stranger there. We are enveloped by the power and the mystery, and the place where the forest ends, and we begin, becomes blurred. We breathe it in, and it becomes part of our physical and spiritual essence. And when we leave, a part of the forest stays with us. The sights, sounds, smells and textures are recorded at a cellular level.

Go to the forest. It awaits you. You will come out with much more than that which you went in with.

Gwen Randall-Young is an author and psychotherapist in private practice. For articles, and information about her books and CDs go to (www.gwen.ca). See display ad this issue.

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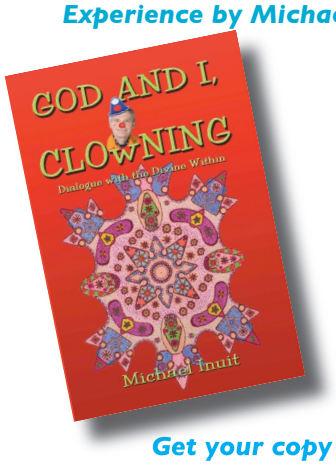

Within each of you, I am the Self,
clowning with My clones.
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in a simple dialogue, is it possible?
I created your Spirit for that!

To listen to Me, God, you need to stop thinking.
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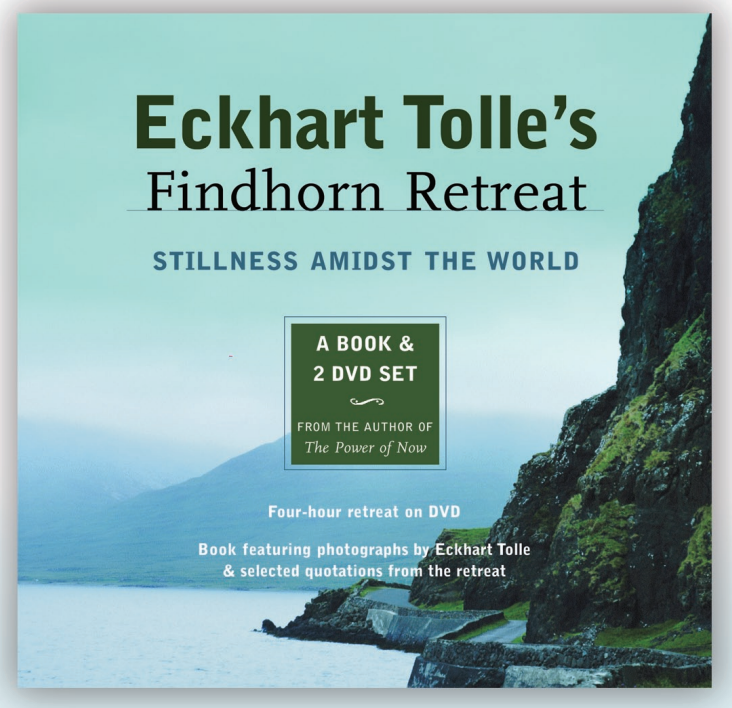

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- **Anxiety**
- **Irritability**
- **Mood swings**
- **Insomnia**
- **"Foggy" thinking**
- **Heavy periods**
- **Breast tenderness**
- **Cyclic Headaches**
- **Fatigue**
- **Decreased Libido**
- **Weight gain (abdomen, hips, thighs)**

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Reader Survey

Dear Common Ground Reader,

We'd love your help to keep Common Ground relevant and inspirational to you. Your feedback by filling out this short survey is incredibly important to us. We'll be giving great prizes by random draw and a special prize of for your idea for improving the magazine if we implement it. Prizes include a free bicycle of up to $500 value from Dan's Bike Shop, dinner for 4 worth $100 at Aphrodites Cafe & Pie Shop, and $50 worth of dry cleaning from Helping Hand Cleaners. These are just small tokens of our gratitude to you for sending us your thoughts. The rest of our gratitude will be shown in the exciting issues of Common Ground to come!

Of course we'll make sure that all your responses remain strictly confidential. Please fill out this survey, and either clip it out and mail it to Common Ground Head Office, 204-4381 Fraser St., Vancouver, BC V5V 4G4, or fax it at 604-733-4415. You can also find the survey on our website www.commonground.ca where you can fill it out online or print it out and mail it.

Section 1. How is Common Ground doing?

1. What characteristics of Common Ground (CG) made you most interested in reading it?_____

2. What is it about CG that distinguishes if from other publications for you?_____

3. What is your primary purpose for reading CG?
___Read feature articles
___Read favourite columnists
___Browse by images and headlines for interesting articles
___Browse entire magazine for resources, articles and ads of interest.

4. Do want us to keep bringing you features about topics like healthy democracy, Enronizing BC, and features that other media doesn't cover? ___Y ___N.

5. Rank the following subject areas showing which you are most passionate about (4 for most passionate about, 1 for most passionate):
___Medicine, Our Culture, Health and Spirituality (Healthy People)
___Politics and the World (Healthy Democracy)
___Environment and Activism (Healthy Planet)
___Films, Arts, Foods, Media and Upcoming Events (Culture)
___Other:_____.

6. Which of our regular content do you most often read (check as many as you like)?
___Health Features by Alan Cassels
___Features by Geoff Olson
___Features by _____(name your favourite columnist)
___Environment: SCIENCE MATTERS by David Suzuki
___Culture: FILMS by Robert Alstead
___Earth future by Guy Dauncey
___Health: Nutrispeak by Vesanto Melina
___Organics: Garden Path by Carolyn Herriot
___Spirituality: Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle
___Universe Within by Gwen Randall-Young
___Culture by Ishi Dinim.

7. Which of the following actions have you taken in the last 12 months (you may check more than one)?
___Cut out or photocopied an article(s) or ad
___Discussed an article or ad with someone
___Kept an issue for future reference
___Gave an issue to a friend, colleague or relative
___Recommended a product or service seen in CG to someone
___Made a purchase based on an article or ad
___Requested information on a product or service
___Emailed or visited an advertiser's website.

8. Suggest your ideas for improving CG:_____
_____

9. How often do you read CG?
___Every month ___Frequently ___Occasionally ___Rarely ___First time today.

10. Do you own or use a computer? ___Y ___N.

11. How often do you visit our website? ___Often ___Rarely ___First time today ___Never.

12. How long have you been reading CG?: ____(number of months), or ___(number of years).

13. How long do you keep your copy (number of days, weeks, months, years)? _____.

14. Number of times you refer each copy or share it with other people? _____.

Section 2. Tell us about yourself

15. Where do you live?
_____(city), _____(neighbourhood).

16. Which of the following are most important in your life:
Very Important Somewhat Important Not Important.

Seeking spiritual inspiration
Social activism
Mind/body connection
Environmental issues
Arts and creativity
Responsible use of science and technology
Healthy living
Other:_____.

17. What are your three favourite hobbies? _____.

18. What career or stage of your career are you in? ___Self-employed
___Executive
___Manager/director
___Non-management
___Entry-level
___Student
___Part-time
___Retired
___Unemployed
___Other (please describe):_____.

19. Type of housing: ___Own your home
___Rent apartment or house
___Co-op living situation
___Other (please describe):_____.

20. Your family group: ___Number of children
___Number of people living in your household.

21. Your birth order:
___First born
___Second born or middle child
___Youngest
___Only child.

22. What are your first and second most used forms of everyday transportation?
___car or other gas vehicle
___carpool or shared vehicle situation
___hybrid or smartcar
___public transit
___bike or non-motorized vehicle
___walking
___other (please describe):_____.

23. Would you prefer an electric vehicle to a gas vehicle?
___Y ___N.

24. What media do you frequently read, watch or listen to, besides CG? (please describe)_____.

25. What style(s) of music do you most often listen to? (please describe)_____.

26. Education: ___High School
___College
___University
___Masters or PhD
___Trade school
___Special course (list type):_____
Other:_____.

27. Relationship status:
___Presently married
___in long-term relationship
___single
___divorced
___separated
___looking for a relationship.

28. Annual household income:___$0-19K ___$20-29K
___$30-39K ___$40-49K ___$50-59K ___$60-69K
___$70-79K ___$80-89K ___$90-100K
___Above 100K (please state):_____.

29. Age:____.

30. Gender:___M ___F.

Section 3. About Products and Services found in Common Ground

31. How often have you noticed an interesting product or service or event while browsing CG in the past year?
___Many times
___Several times
___Once
___Never.

32. How many times have you purchased the following products or services in the past year? 7 or more times
4 to 6 times
1 to 3 times
Never. Yoga classes or materials
Spiritual classes or workshops
Other workshops or retreats
Meditation instruction
Learning to teach healing arts
Films, music, books, DVDs
Health food products
Organic products
Supplements for health and healing
Career and life coaching
Alternative medical or dental care
Oriental medical care (acupuncture and Chinese medicine)
Psychological therapy or counselling
Massage or bodywork
Other(s):_____.

33. For events, products or services found in articles and ads of CG how often have you done the following in the past year? 7 or more times
4 to 6 times
1 to 3 times
Never. ____Made a call to get more information
___Visited a website
___Purchased a service, book or product
___Attended an event
___Suggested any of the above to another person.
34. Who would you recommend to advertise in CG? _____
_____.

In 20 words or less, what would you like to say to us? _____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank You for filling out the Common Ground Reader's Survey! Please fill out this ballot to enter to win a prize from our prize draw. All survey responses will remain anonymous and confidential.
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Clip Survey and mail to: Common Ground, 204-4381 Fraser St., Vancouver, BC V5V 4G4, Fax: 604-733-4415. Website: www.commonground.ca. Email: joseph@commonground.ca

Ten months without democratic representation

Ten months have passed since David Emerson, elected by his constituents to represent them in parliament as a Liberal, decided to ignore the votes of 46,168 electors in Vancouver-Kingsway. He took a cabinet position in Stephen Harper's Conservative government, creating Harper's first political albatross in the process.

As Stephen Harper considers the longevity of his minority government, he will have instructed his Conservative Party to step up preparations for another election, by ensuring that candidates are nominated in every riding in the country. Most political pundits expect a spring 2007 election, but no one will discount the possibility of a surprise election call from Harper, perhaps mischievously timed to coincide with the conclusion of the Liberal party leadership race in late November.

One of the interesting questions now is whether former Liberal turned Conservative David Emerson will run for office in the next federal election. We won't have long to wait for an answer – the Conservative party will force him to make a declaration within the next few months. Almost no one expects Emerson to run (and be slaughtered) in Vancouver – Kingsway. And few expect him to run at all, in any riding.

David Emerson and Stephen Harper will come and go, but what they did brought the issue of our fragile democracy into sharp relief, and galvanized public opinion on the issue of floor crossing. Who will mark their X on future ballots, without considering how meaningless some of our politicians consider our votes?

Crossing the floor, without seeking a mandate, leaves a constituency misrepresented. That, clearly, is not democracy in action. While nothing in law or custom prevented Emerson from thumbing his nose at the collective will of his constituents, we will have the final say in his career, and in the process send a strong message to other politicians that might be tempted to choose expediency over democracy.

Mike Watkins is a director of the advocacy group Real Democracy*, formed by residents of Vancouver – Kingsway in response to the David Emerson affair. For more information visit* (www.realdemocracy.ca).

artwork by Manuela Grimm

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Hurting

TWENTY SOMETHING • *ISHI DINIM*

Pain brings us into the world, just ask mothers, and it is felt when people leave it. Life is hard, there are not enough painkillers, or airbags, or risk managers to prevent this inevitability. All levels of humanity share this most universal experience. We learn a great deal from suffering: from love's broken hearts, that touching fire burns, and grief to stories of others' hardships. I believe that this bond between us should logically lead humanity towards greater empathy, compassion, and kindness. Why then, do so many people consciously bring agony upon others?

There are individuals so miserable with themselves that they decide to turn school zones into war zones. I can't think of a more unfathomable decision than wanting to turn a place of sharing and learning into a place of bloodshed. This happens both on macro, and micro levels: smart bomb, katushya rocket, artillery shell, or school shooting. The violence that occurs in these places doesn't intrinsically change them from places of sharing and learning, if the premise of learning from pain can be accepted: compost continues to bring life to a garden.

I am not sure if I want to know what brings a person to kill strangers and themselves. There are things in our lives that seem simply irreconcilable at times, and still we find ways to negotiate those very difficult parts, and reach acceptance of our plight. We have an innate desire to share and express, but we can be so disconnected that we can't talk about the heart of a matter, or even get to it, and that is when terrible things can happen. Maybe schools, symbolic in their openness, seem like the target for a stifled jealous mind?

Why do different people reach different conclusions given the same information? Two people experience similar traumas and one perpetuates their experience while the next person may not. I've heard explanations on the cyclical nature of abuse. Some abusers come from within that cycle, while others come from without. And then, quite wonderfully, some abused people can break that cycle altogether, with determination and honesty.

> ***I've heard explanations on the cyclical nature of abuse. Some abusers come from within that cycle, while others come from without. And then, quite wonderfully, some abused people can break that cycle altogether, with determination and honesty.***

If you can't be honest with someone else at least be honest with yourself. The truth hurts sometimes, but it will be far safer than living in a lie.

Quotes:

It takes all kinds of people to make the world. – Kilgore Trout

Thank you plants and animals.
– Child's mealtime prayer

Films:

- *Mondo Magic*
- *The Cabin Movie*

Ishi graduated from Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 2001, with a BFA major in photography. He makes films, collects cacti, and ponders many things. Currently he is trying to figure out what to do with the rest his life.
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Creating Critical Mass

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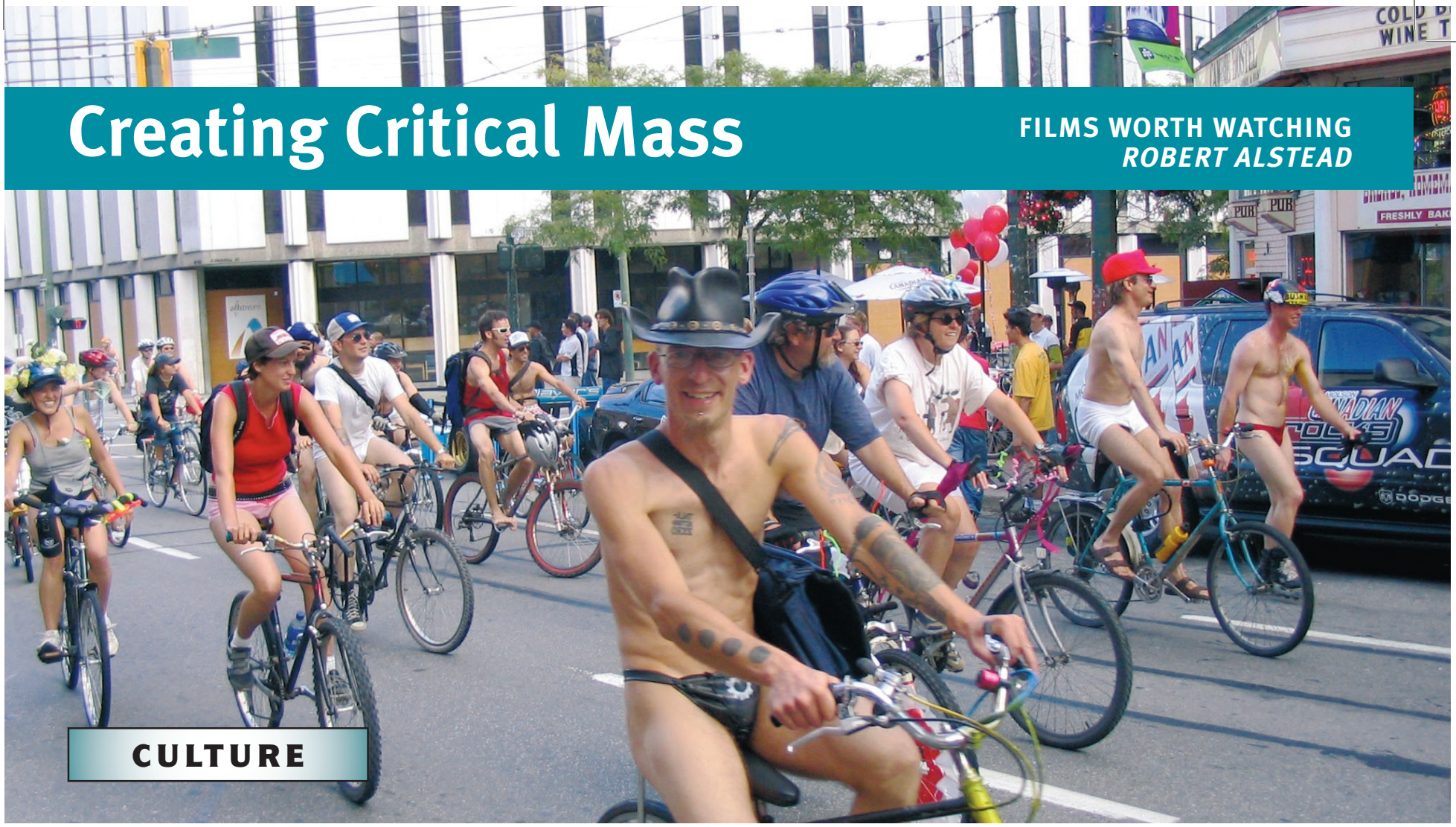

Vancouver cyclists on the Wholesome Undie, the underwear ride protesting the Molson Indy race.

They call themselves "freak bikers." You can't miss them when they hit the streets. Some of them are on tall bikes, made out of two or three old frames, welded one on top of the other; riders spin frenetically on tiny, undersized bikes; while still others have manufactured something completely unique with the aid of welder and torch.

It's this spirit of fun that cyclists always seem to hover on in the interviews that I've conducted over the last couple of years. It's also the keynote I've aimed for in my 80-minute documentary, *You Never Bike Alone,* which looks at the development of Vancouver's growing bike culture and weighs in on the progress and challenges cyclists face today. The film will have its world premiere on the 26th of this month, at the recently refurbished Rio Theatre at Broadway and Commercial.

I focus, in particular, on the evolution of Vancouver's Critical Mass. These rides take place on the last Friday of every month in cities around the world; hundreds of cyclists ride together, enjoying the safety and calm of large numbers. Often called, "a party on wheels," the rides provide great spectacle, but they also bring into focus issues such as road-share and road rage.

Some cyclists steer clear of Critical Mass, believing that it sends motorists the wrong message about bike culture. Whatever one's stance on the matter the rides have played a big part in cementing the city's network of cyclists. The film goes back a decade to the protest rides across the Lions Gate Bridge in the early to mid-nineties. Then looks at the "No Fun City" years of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when cyclists were arrested for riding en masse. This past June, more than 1,800 people took over Vancouver streets. I also cover some of the numerous spin-off rides, such as the World Naked Bike Ride and Wholesome Undie (an underwear ride protesting the Molson Indy).

As we all know, safety is a big deterrent for many would-be cyclists. To its credit the City of Vancouver has been doing much more in recent years, with a growing bike network. In *You Never Bike Alone,* one of the early advocates at planning level, former city councilor and cyclist Gordon Price talks about the political realities of trying to build bike mass through lanes.

An eloquent transportation commentator, Price, along with other experts, provide a strong argument against Transportation Minister Kevin Falcon and Premier Gordon Campbell, who assert that highway expansion is the only way to solve congestion problems in the Lower Mainland.

Keeping in the spirit of the project I travelled by bike, camera in hand. This produced some terrific movement and tracking shots. It also allowed me to get into the thick of things – scrambles in the road or a melee of naked bikers at the crest of a bridge: You could only be there on a bike.

Bikes also feature in the deadpan Canadian comedy: *Monkey Warfare* (due out this month). Cyclists Dan (Don McKellar) and Linda (Tracy Wright) are a jaded couple in their 40s; radicals who survive off the grid in Toronto by scavenging garbage and selling it.

Their flagging counter-culturalism is challenged when their young dope-pusher daughter, Susan (Nadia Litz), starts acting on ideas she reads in Dan's radical literature. Enjoyable performances and stylized direction can't hide the silliness of the central premise that involves tossing Molotov cocktails at SUVs, to hit back at "the system." But, with its rebel soundtrack and witty dialogue, it remains a diverting experiment.

You Never Bike Alone *2pm Sunday, November 26. Rio Theatre, 1660 East Broadway. Tickets $8. More info and DVD available at (www.youneverbikealone.com).*

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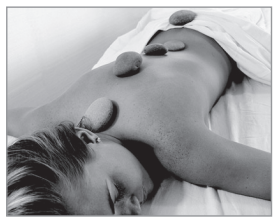

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On Track Zodiac

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ARIES
(Mar 21 - Apr 19)

You realize the impact your childhood has had on you psychologically, giving you a stronger than usual desire to attend to your past. Within the next months a great opportunity comes that brings courage to forgive any neglect on your part to self heal.

TAURUS
(Apr 20 - May 21)

You might feel a thirst for the metaphysical or astrological sciences. It's not your usual bent and you could find yourself thinking outside the box. A sense of wonder and openness is in your range of experience as you bring more insight to your concept of reality.

GEMINI
(May 22 - Jun 20)

To strive for perfection is a demanding approach if you haven't built up your self-esteem. You will raise your confidence if you don't dismantle your morale in the process. Being the best you can be is within your reach and small steps will lead to success.

CANCER
(Jun 21 - Jul 22)

You could find your heart leading you toward a higher degree of devotion and selflessness. There is no martyrdom in your relationships now. True acts of charity and the concern for others may be a trend that you follow in a larger than usual manner. There is bliss in your offerings.

LEO
(Jul 23 - Aug 22)

If you have even the smallest degree of tension in your love life, saying something harsh could turn into a big problem. Use more sensitivity with others or you could find your temper colliding into less then harmonious situations. Better communication is essential before misunderstandings become larger than the truth.

VIRGO
(Aug 23 - Sep 22)

Autumn leaves are gone and a new season begins with your hope ignited and invigorated. Lately it could have felt like you were trying to lift a concrete block with a feather. If your educational advancement was suddenly blocked or you were obstructed from continuing your dreams, now the way through comes with more ease.

LIBRA (Sep 23 - Oct 22)

Many self destructive notions are attributed to the dark side of ones nature. If you are being drawn to extremes, it's the desire to know all aspects of yourself. Huge contrasts in life, allow a charming Libran to discover another side of their character. Traditionally "The Fool" travels to darker places to learn about lightness.

SCORPIO
(Oct 23 - Nov 21)

With the predominance of planets in Scorpio you could find it difficult to work with others. A need to express yourself and fulfill more personal matters will have little to do with others. It's not so much about secrecy or selfishness as it is your need for solitude in which to thrive.

SAGITTARIUS
(Nov 22 - Dec 21)

This is a great time to get your point across and express your views. Your mind is sharp and contracts and negotiations take precedence. You will apply your business acumen and make some well informed discussions. Seems that you will leave no stone unturned as you further your particular level of progress.

CAPRICORN
(Dec 22 - Jan 19)

Responsibility and freedom merge. Your personal relationships can't withstand the old patterns that you have outgrown. If you feel undo stress and aren't getting support from others you may end some outmoded friends and acquaintances. You are what you give.

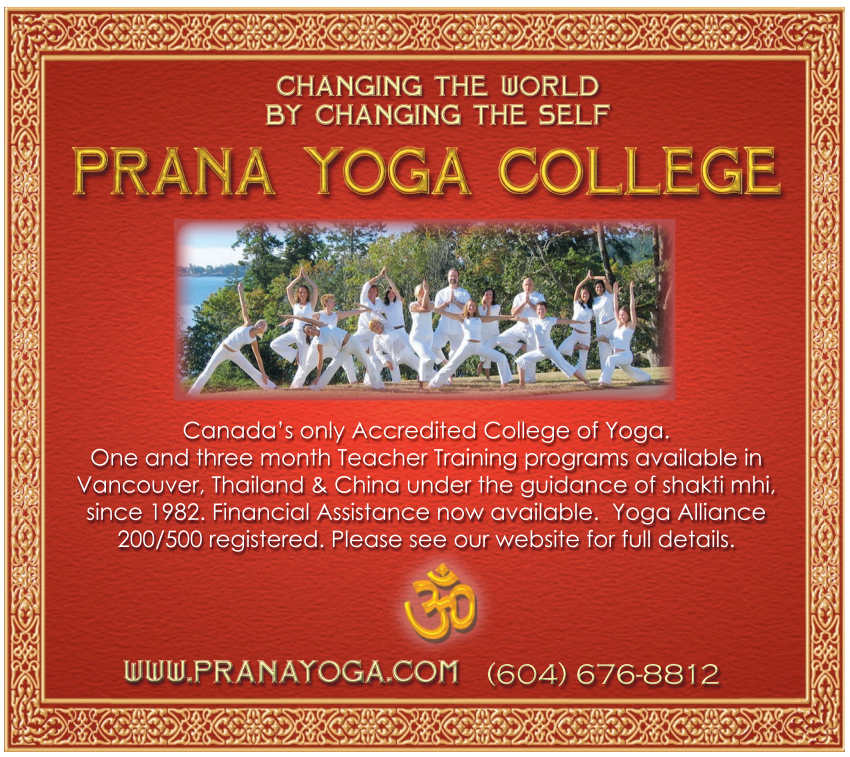
AQUARIUS
(Jan 20 -Feb 19)

While a new transit hits your increasing appetite for the lavish life you may have a weakness for all things grand and luxurious. Comfort may be what is needed instead of filling up a hole marked with dissatisfaction. This period of over indulgence is harmless as long as you keep within a direction of balance.

PISCES
(Feb 20- Mar 20)

With so many planets in water signs now, you are in your element. Creativity is high and so is a sense of confusion if you are primarily a dreamer. Balance your emotions with good old fashioned earthy tasks. Anything you try your hand at will have an element of ingenuity and revelation.

Ilona Hedi Granik is a clairvoyant consultant and author with 31 years of experience in astrology, multi-media art and healing. (iamilona@gmail.com) (www.HeartLightCentre.com).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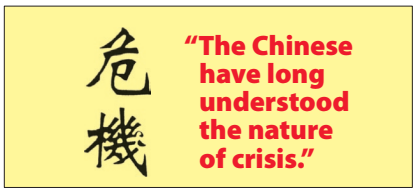

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I believe that the time has come for all of us to examine the conclusions that our authors reached, and to come to an understanding of how we can help to effect societal change by changing our own individual outlook. (Books available on the market or at libraries.)

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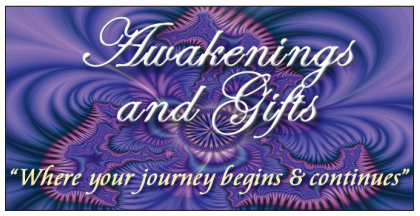

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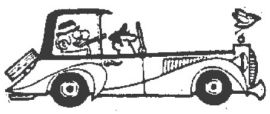

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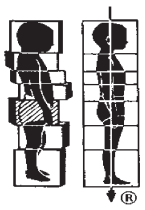

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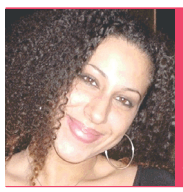

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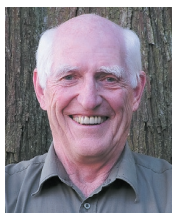

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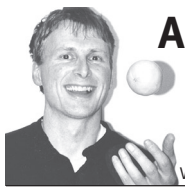

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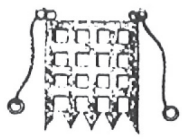

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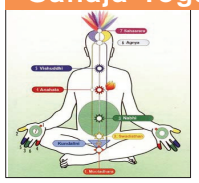

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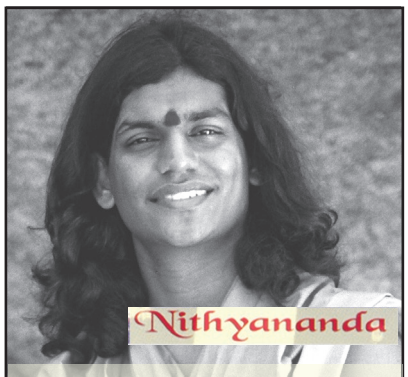

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Paint from the soul to expand the heart Workshop: Create beautiful paintings from your inner vision. No experience necessary. Painting, printing, collage. Supplies provided. Anita Nairne, 604-684-6418, (anitanairne@telus.net) (www.anitanairne.com).

NOV 24, 25, 26
Satsang with Muni: Investigating the truth in the moment. Public meeting: Friday 7-9pm ($15 suggested donation). Intensive: Saturday 10am-4:30pm ($75). Location: Masonic Hall, Vancouver.

NOV 24, 25, 26
Listen to the Child Within: With dance, drawing, imagination. We'll rediscover the source of our creative, spiritual Self. Info:604-986-6009 or (guenterbay@web.de)

NOV 25, 26
Crystal Singing Bowl Workshops: The tones are relaxing, restorative and therapeutic. Learn how to play, apply and more. 604-781-5554. $125/day. 10 am - 5 pm. (www.sacredsound.ca)

DEC 2
Oliver Schroer's Camino Live: A richly textured evening of violin music, stories and images from an ancient European pilgrimage - the Camino de Santiago, St. Andrew's-Wesley (1022 Nelson Ave.), 7:30pm. Tickets Tonight 604-231-7535 (www.ticketstonight.ca) or (www.oliverschroer.com).

DEC. 24-27
Christmas Celebration Retreat: A silent, spiritual retreat to experience the full spiritual depth of this beautiful time. Includes special meditation times, nourishing food and comfortable accommodation. SRMH Centre, Sunshine Coast. 604-740-0898.

DEC 29 – JAN 1
New Year Gathering: For all who wish to come and imbibe in the peace and beauty of our spiritual centre as the new year begins. SRMH Centre, Sunshine Coast. 604-740-0898.

SATURDAYS

Holistic Healing Fair: Third Saturday of every month. AWAKENING HEART-15177 Russell Ave-White Rock. 10-4pm. Free Admission. 604-535-6603 or (www.emergingpathway.ca).

SUNDAYS

The Centre for Spiritual Living uniting the world in love. Inspired by the teachings of Deepak Chopra and Louise Hay. You'll love our Sunday services, 11 AM. Children welcome. 1495 W. 8th Ave.,Vancouver, 604-321-1225 (www.cslvancouver.com).

International Spiritualist Alliance: #201-317 Columbia Street, New West, 604-521-6336. Sunday services, 11am. Rev. Joyce Tarvin, 604-433-6663. See Resource Directory (www.isacanada.ca).

Mountaintop Unity Find a positive New Thought approach to life at Unity! Sundays 10:30am, John Braithwaite Community Centre, 145 West 1st, North Vancouver. 604-787-1477 (www.unitymountaintop.ca).

MONDAYS

Free, anonymous, telephone support line offering guided meditations for people suffering from chronic pain. Non-religious. Counselors have community crisis line training. Mondays 7pm-11pm, 604-936-5683.

TUESDAYS

Pranic Healing Clinics: Non-touch energy healing. By donation. Tuesdays 11am-3pm and 6pm-9pm. 2950 Laurel St, Vancouver. Closed last Tuesday of month (www.pranichealing.ca/vancouver).

Reflexology Student Clinic sessions, only $18. Evenings only. By appointment. Pacific Institute of Reflexology. 604-875-8818.

WEDNESDAYS

Hawaiian Healing Night: 7 pm. Hawaiian guided meditation, Sharing the Aloha and snacks afterward. Meet like-minded people and share. $5 donation. At Hale Ola, a place of Healing, 1215 Madison Ave., Burnaby. 604-431-7474, Kaimana and Moanikeala.

Meditation & Self-inquiry: Have you lost the balance and rhythm in your life? Let stillness (through self-inquiry) return your wholeness. 5-7pm, 604-317-1613.

Children of War fundraiser: Chai Gallery at East Is East hosts a fundraiser (www.thechildrenofwar.org) featuring musicians & traditional dancers. Every Wed. 7:30pm – 1:30am, 3243 W. Broadway. $25/door or call 778-837-1862.

Eastside Culture Crawl

November 24 - 26

The Eastside Culture Crawl is an annual three day visual arts festival. This event involves artists who work on the east side of Vancouver, in an area bounded by Main Street to Commercial Drive and from First Avenue north to the waterfront. It began officially in 1997 with 45 artists in three Strathcona area studio buildings and was attended by a few hundred people. This year will mark its 10th anniversary!

Painters, jewellers, sculptors, furniture makers, musicians, weavers, potters, writers, printmakers, photographers, glassblowers; from emerging artists to those of international fame – these are just a sampling of the exciting talents featured during this unique chance to meet local artists in their studios.

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HOMEOPATHY COURSES: Online Foundation Course for beginners. Advanced courses and seminars (www.homeopathycourses.com) 604-947-0757.

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THURSDAYS

Pranic Healing Clinic: Non-touch energy healing. By donation. West Vancouver United Church, 2062 Esquimalt Ave. Thursdays 10am-2pm. Closed last Thursday of month (www.pranichealing.ca/vancouver).

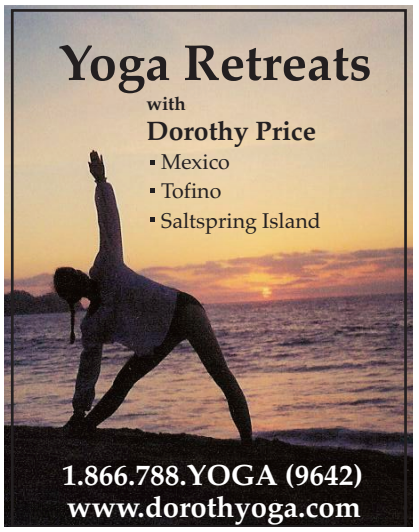
ONGOING

Free Meditation Workshop: Experience Kundalini awakening through Sahaja Yoga, as taught by Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi & enjoy your Powers at our Weekly classes, always free and open to all. 604-597-8440 (www.sahajayoga.org).

Prana Yoga College Teacher Training in Thailand January/07. Courses open to the public Nov/06, 604-682-2121 or (www.pranayoga.com).

Anxiety? Depression? FREE Mental Wellness Self-Help Support Group in Kitsilano area. Held Saturdays bi-weekly, 10:30am-12:30pm. Limited Seating. Call 604-630-6865.

Deadline for December issue: November 15



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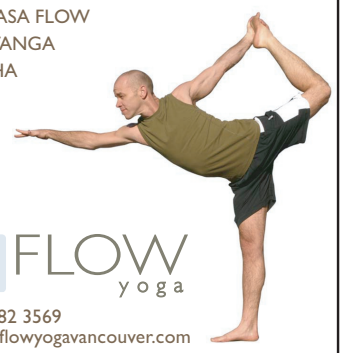

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Untangling the roots of addiction: communities across BC grapple with meth, and more, using Forum Theatre

BY JEN CRESSEY

"A person who doesn't express themselves gets sick, right? Well, imagine that a community is a living thing. A community needs to express itself, or it will get sick," states David Diamond, Artistic Director of Headlines Theatre.

Referring to Diamond's statement, Grand Chief Dr. Rose Charlie adds, "That is a big part of why you see social problems in First Nations communities: we have become disconnected from our ways of expressing ourselves." Charlie was part of the group that invited Headlines Theatre to look at the crystal meth use on reserves, a problem she characterizes as "the new plague."

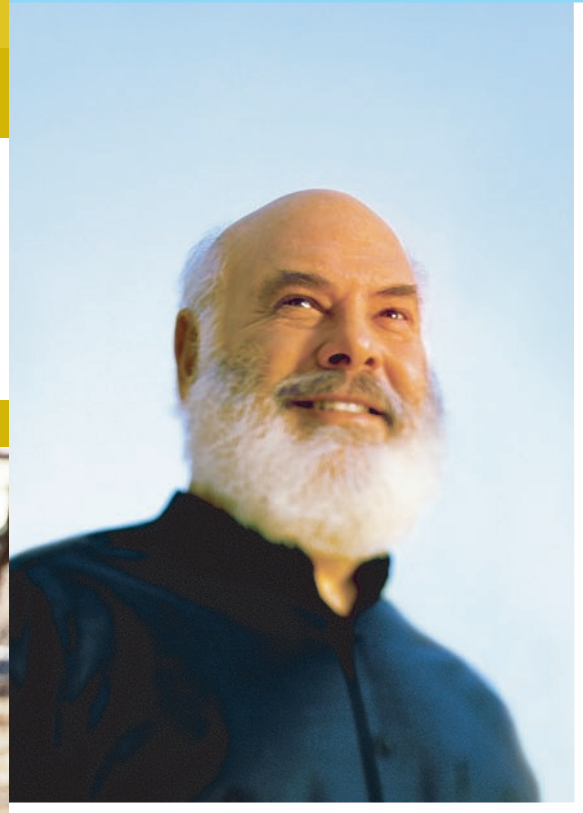
First Nations communities are not alone in their struggle with the highly addictive drug. An oft-reported "meth crisis" has quickly spread through diverse communities in both urban and rural populations. The response has been equally swift; task forces are in full gear and drug-specific school prevention programs have sprung up seemingly overnight. The public is concerned, and action is being taken. That concern is well founded; among a host of symptoms, meth addicts often suffer from psychotic episodes that make them violent and difficult to treat.

But there may be danger in isolating crystal meth from other narcotics, and the continuum of addiction in general. There is strong evidence to support the idea that while effects of various addictions can differ drastically, the causes are the same.

The Authentic Voice of the Community

Diamond is a major proponent of the vital nature of a community's voice. He creates and directs Forum Theatre, an audience-interactive approach that originated in Brazil. Rather than have issues gleaned, processed, and presented by people studying them, Forum Theatre puts the real experts onstage, people who have struggled with the issues.

"The origin of theatre is people getting together to tell stories and to articulate their triumphs and defeats, " says Diamond, "now we pay to watch strangers tell us stories about other strangers' lives. Stories have



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Andrew Weil, M.D.

Veins become varicose when the valves that normally prevent blood from flowing backward don't function properly, and when vein walls become weak. To help reduce the discomfort of varicose veins, we recommend the Leg Circulation Formula, which features Horse Chestnut Seed, an herbal extract clinically studied for the promotion of healthy blood vessels.

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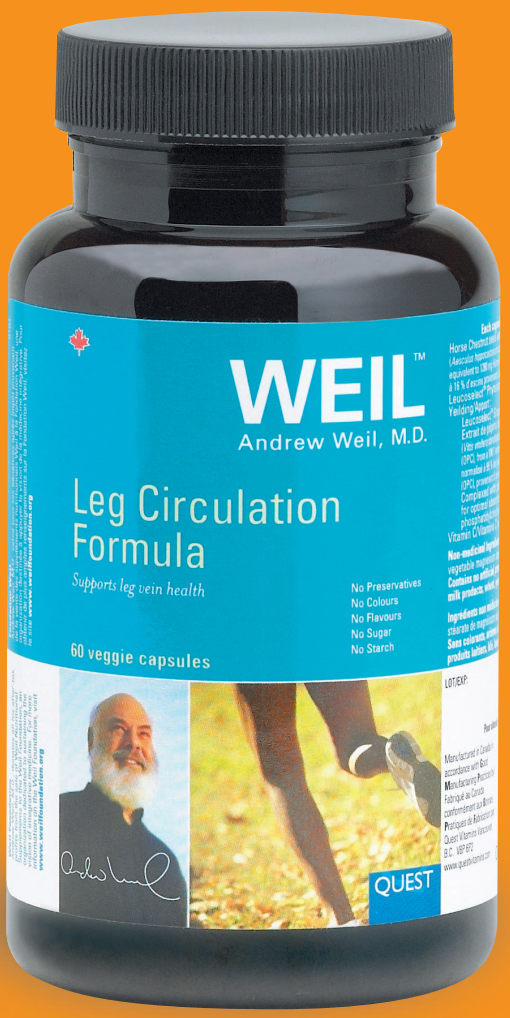

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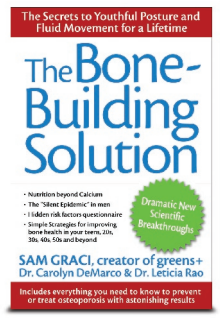
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